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EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING IN ROMANIA – PERSPECTIVES OF THE YEAR 2020

Abstract

Our research study focuses on the problems of education and lifelong learning in the Romanian society of the year 2020.

Starting from the idea that lifelong learning represents the continuous building of skills and knowledge through the life of an individual, we believe that the process of continuous education is the key element that each and every society should be based on. For us, as professors and researchers, the idea of pursuing knowledge out of either personal or professional reasons, has always been a main trigger of our activity.

The paper starts with an introduction on the subject of education and lifelong learning in which we have motivated our decision in choosing this particular theme and also which are the main objectives of our study; continues with a literature review part in which we present the studies that have already been made in terms of education and lifelong learning, focusing on the most relevant ideas of academics and researchers in our opinion; presents in the body of the paper the importance, the role and the stages of lifelong learning and the impact upon the education process; focuses mainly on a case study that we have made on Romania and the results of our research in this matter; ends with a part of conclusions and limitations that our paper has. For the case study on Romania, in terms of methodology, we have used questioners and interviews that we gave to a number of 200 adult individuals during the time period 2010 and 2011 on the topic of education.

Key words: education, lifelong learning, personal development, competitiveness, competitive advantage, technology of information, economy, economic crisis

Introduction

We have chosen the topic of education and lifelong learning, due to the fact that we strongly believe that the key of any successful and well trained individual lies in its potential to have access to more and better knowledge and continuously reinvent him so to say.

The objectives of our research paper are the following ones: firstly, to present some relevant definitions regarding education and lifelong learning, that specialists generally accept and agree on; secondly, to emphasize the importance, the role and the stages of lifelong learning and the impact upon the education process; thirdly, to show the stage in which the process of lifelong learning can be found in Romania and its future perspectives; fourthly, to express our own ideas and possible solutions concerning the evolution of our society in the year 2020, a critical time due to the economic crisis.

In respect to the methods and means that we used in our paper we can state the fact that for the theoretical part we focused on previous research papers, books and

studies belonging to academics, researchers and practitioners in the field of education; and for the case study part we used our own data gathered from a number of 200 Romanian adult individuals that accepted to fill in our questioner and participate in an interviewing activity conducted by us.

In terms of literature review, it is a clear fact that until now there have been done numerous studies on lifelong learning and education worldwide. However, our research brings more information concerning the view of Romanian individuals on this subject and also mainly focuses on the impact of the economic crisis on their learning planes, programs and future perspectives.

Literature review

Initial information resources were generated by performing a literature review search through academic and research well known data bases, such as ISI Web of Knowledge, Scopus, EBSCO, EconLit, REPEC, DOAJ, Cabell's, JSTORE, Science Direct, SpringerLink, ProQuest. Bibliographies were collected from a number of leading national and international specialists on the topic of education and lifelong learning. The primary source in terms of literature review was professional journals. It should be noted that the literature search focused on studies measuring the impact of lifelong learning and education system improvement mainly on students at the universities. Also, we focused on papers published in international conference proceedings, which took into account the topic of education and lifelong learning.

In this matter, Fies & Marshall (2006) focused on classroom response systems, Handelsman, Ebert-May, Beichner, Bruns, Chang, DeHaan, et al. (2004) made a research on scientific teaching, Huba & Freed (2000) gathered data on learner - centered assessment on college campuses, Keeney-Kennicutt, Gunersel & Simpson (2008) stressed students' resistance to teaching innovation, Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) focused on formative assessment and self - regulated learning, while Teunissen & Dornan (2008) were keen on the topic of lifelong learning at work.

Education and lifelong learning – a case study on the Romanian society

Research methods and data collection

The way in which our research method and data collecting process is done is crucial for us, as research economists. Moreover, the way in which we select individuals and institutions in order to hold our work and have relevant data in the end represents the key element to understanding our research evidence and its implications for policy and practice.

Sample and data collection

The data collection process implicated giving questioners and holding interviews to a number of 200 Romanian adult individuals, during the time period 2010 and 2011.

We have chosen as research tools a questionnaire and an interview session, both specially designed according to three final objectives: determining the current state of the lifelong learning process in the Romanian education system at the university level; showing the Romanian students perception on the real benefits of enrolling in such a system and emphasizing the Romanian students beliefs regarding the

usefulness and applicability of the information studied at the university in their future places of work. Of course, in terms of measurement items, some of them were adapted from specific literature where possible, while new items were developed according to the defined goals.

At the beginning of our research process, the questionnaire and the interview set of questions were firstly tested and revised accordingly. The testing was carried between January 2010 and December 2011, focusing in total on 200 Romanian students. The respondents were randomly selected, representing a diverse sample with 35% men and 65% women, with ages ranging between 18 and 60 years old.

The students chosen were from two Romanian prestigious state universities in a random order, respectively from all the three years of study. In respect to the subjects or disciplines students studied we can mention: business studies and economics, accounting, informatics, audit, controlling, public administration, marketing, management, sociology and teacher education.

As a general state of the research done, to each adult individual subjected to our research we have both given to fill in the questioner as well as answer to our interview set of questions. The questioners were distributed on a material support and were divided into two sections: the first section referred to the importance of lifelong learning for them and their own feelings towards such a complex process; the second section referred to their perception regarding the usefulness of the information gathered at the university until the stage they were in (the year they were already studying in). The questioner had also an introductory part for defining concepts which might have posed problems to the respondents, such as the notions lifelong learning, continuous education and trainings. The interviews aimed to help us create a clear image concerning the current state of the lifelong learning process in the Romanian education system at the university level. For us, the major debate issues were related to questions such as: can Romania be considered nowadays ready to adapt itself to the lifelong learning requirements of the European Union's programs; what are Romania's costs in terms of education in both public and private sector and can it be considered a country capable to support access to lifelong learning to the young generation.

Data Analysis and Results

The interpretation started from the data gathered by us and was oriented towards the following aspects:

- Correlation and percentage relation between the initial high school educational background and university studies;
- Variation in motivation in attending normal (mandatory) courses and trainings at the university level;
- Variation in motivation in attending supplementary (optional) courses and trainings both inside and outside the university level;
- Correlation and percentage relation between the education system and the development of the students;
- Correlation and percentage relation between job perspectives and aspirations and students educational background.

In terms of results, we can state the following aspects:

Firstly, in respect to the correlation and percentage relation between the initial high school educational background and university studies we have concluded that, in general, individuals tend to keep in mind the initial path chosen and go one the same trajectory, thus more than 75% of the respondents have stated that high school educational background and university studies are in the same field.

Secondly, in regard to the variation in motivation in attending normal (mandatory) courses and trainings at the university level, the data gathered is significantly different in terms of individuals motivation factors, thus students focused mainly on business studies and economics, public administration, marketing, management, sociology and teacher education attend the normal (mandatory) courses and trainings at the university level in a significant percentage, respectively 65% from the total of individuals studying one of these disciplines, while students focused mainly on accounting, informatics, audit, controlling attend the normal (mandatory) courses and trainings at the university level in a lower percentage, respectively 35% from the total of individuals studying one of these disciplines.

Thirdly, in regard to the variation in motivation in attending supplementary (optional) courses and trainings both inside and outside the university level, the data is interestingly reversed from the one at the send point, thus students focused mainly on business studies and economics, public administration, marketing, management, sociology and teacher education attend the supplementary (optional) courses and trainings at the university level in a significant percentage, respectively 25% from the total of individuals studying one of these disciplines, while students focused mainly on accounting, informatics, audit, controlling attend the supplementary (optional) courses and trainings at the university level in a lower percentage, respectively 85% from the total of individuals studying one of these disciplines.

Fourthly, in terms of the correlation and percentage relation between the education system and the development of students, from the total of respondents, only 35% of them believe that the Romanian educational system will provide them the necessary background and future knowledge in order to gain access to a good job and will ensure them a better development process, meanwhile 65% believe that the Romanian educational system does not provide in all cases up to date information, especially in fields in which information is perishable, such as economics, business, informatics, information systems, accounting, audit.

Fifthly, in terms of correlation and percentage relation between job perspectives and aspirations and students educational background, the data collected showed the first place is occupied by students that study accounting, informatics, audit and controlling, due to the fact that 95% of the students belonging to these fields feel extremely confident in finding a job, mainly because of the high applicability of the knowledge gained especially threw courses and private trainings, the second place belongs to students studying business and economics, marketing and management, due to the fact that 75% of the students belonging to these fields feel confident in finding a job in the next future, the third place belongs to students focused on fields such as public administration, sociology and teacher education, due to the fact that 55% of the students belonging to these fields feel less confident in finding a job in the next future.

The interview that we carried out in the same time as we asked for answers to the questioners was based on open questions aimed to help us create a clear image concerning the current state of the lifelong learning process in the Romanian education system at the university level. Trying to find concluding answers to three basic questions: a) can Romania be considered nowadays ready to adapt itself to the lifelong learning requirements of the European Union's programs; b) what are Romania's costs in terms of education in both public and private sector and can it be considered a country capable to support access to lifelong learning to the young generation; c) can Romania be considered a lifelong learning continuously adapting society, were our main targets.

Conclusions

In terms of results, for the first question asked during the interview, 55% of the students felt confident enough in stating that Romania is ended on the right track, and can be considered nowadays ready to adapt itself to the lifelong learning requirements of the European Union's programs. As arguments, the most frequent ones were related to the assumption that Romania, being part of the European Union, will be mainly forced to focus on the general requirements of an already opened and free labor market place. Moreover, for the second question asked during the interview, 90% of the respondents believe that Romania does not really invest in the young generation. The main arguments that students brought into discussion were related to the ideas that by law the budget places are less and less each year (in the state education system, of course), compared with the tax places, which clearly restricts access to university education for some individuals; the foreign exchange programs for students are more and more restrictive, and due to a limited and insufficient budget right from the start, only some students have access to these programs, and not in all cases the best of them; the normal scholarship and the merit scholarship provide a symbolic sum of money to real talented and hardworking students, meanwhile a student that has chosen in turn a part time job is clearly more advantaged, both in terms of money and in terms of future options for getting a better job in the future. For the last question asked during the interview, 25% of the respondents believe that Romania can be considered a lifelong learning continuously adapting society. One great concern showed by the majority of the respondents at this point referred to the fact that Romania cannot be considered in their opinion a secure environment in terms of almost any law continuity, economic and business trends, education agenda and curricula, financial and labour market and the list can easily continue.

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